

RECREATIONAL GOLD MINING IN ALASKA

Gold mining is not just a part of Alaska's past, but is still an important activity in many areas of the state. You might like to try your hand at finding some of the precious metal. A U.S. Geological Survey bulletin 1786, "Significant Metalliferous Lode Deposits and Placer Districts of Alaska." describes all of the locations throughout the state of Alaska where metallic minerals have been found. Recreational gold panning and prospecting is permitted, with some restrictions, on most public lands in Alaska. These lands include national forests, wildlife refuges, some state parks, national parks (more restricted), and lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Alaska. On private lands or mining claims, the owner's permission is needed to mine even if you are just gold panning. Alaska Native village and corporation lands are private.

LAND STATUS

It is not easy to determine where on public lands recreational gold mining is possible and permitted. You must always check on the status of the land before beginning your activities. If you are unsure of the status of a particular area, check with the federal Bureau of Land Management. They maintain the most up-to-date maps and information on land status, but you will need to know the exact location of the land in which you are interested; meridian, township, and range, and sometimes section. In Alaska, there is still land with undetermined status pending state and Native corporation claims settlements. For this reason, it is not possible for accurate maps to be widely available.

To determine if an area is open to mineral entry and if there are legal mining claims in an area, contact the state Division of Mining or, for claims on federal lands, the Bureau of Land Management. Once you have determined land status, know that it is public land, that it is open to mineral entry, and that it has no legal claims, check with the managing agency to determine what restrictions might be in force. In many areas, suction dredges are prohibited in order to protect streams.

If you wish to mine on someone else's legal claim, you must first have the permission of the claimant. They may refuse permission because they are busy and/or because of concern about liability in case of injury or vehicle problems or damage. You may take part in other activities such as hiking, camping, or berry picking on mining claims as long as you do not disturb the equipment or operations. As a recreational miner without a claim, you do not have the right to prevent anyone from looking for gold in a particular area.

If you want to file a mining claim, check with the Bureau of Land Management or the State Division of Mining depending on who manages the land of interest.

EQUIPMENT

In most cases, only the use of gold pans, shovels, pry bars and pick, and manually-fed sluice boxes and rocker boxes is allowed in streams on public lands without a permit or authorization. In Chugach and Kenai Peninsula State Parks, the only state parks which are presently open to any recreational mining activity, an individual is limited to one gold pan, one shovel, and one sluice box which is 3 feet or less in length and 15 inches in width. In national parks and preserves, only surface sampling with a hand-held gold pan is allowed. No digging tools are permitted.

Regardless of land status, the use of motorized earth-moving equipment, hydraulic mining either by gravity or mechanical methods or the use of chemicals is not permitted by recreational miners.

Motorized vehicles are limited to existing roads and some trails. In certain situations, trails and some river outwash plains may be open for official travel. Sometimes off-road vehicle permits are required for cross-country travel. Check with the agency in the area of interest.

SUCTION DREDGES

Suction dredges with a suction hose diameter of four inches or less and sixteen horsepower or less may be used under certain conditions in national forests and on BLM lands. Check with the managing agency.

If you are using a dredge of any size, you must check with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat Division. Streams may be restricted because anadromous fish use them for migration, spawning, and/or rearing. Some streams are restricted during certain times of the year. The list of streams is quite long and you must know which stream you are interested in working before requesting a permit.

On any land in Alaska, a suction dredge with a nozzle diameter greater than six inches or a motor with more than sixteen horsepower or which processes more than 20 cubic yards/day requires a tn-agency permit which can be obtained from the Alaska Division of Mining. Suction dredges, if permitted, should be used 300 or more feet from campgrounds. In national forests suction dredges with a suction hose diameter greater than four inches require that a "Notice of Intent" be filed with the district ranger.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

A recreational miner should work only in the active stream channel or on unvegetated gravel bars. No digging or excavating should be done in the streambanks.

Environmental impact should always be considered and minimized. Mining activities in streams might be restricted or have certain time constraints to protect fish and other organisms. For example, gold panning is allowed only for a few weeks in Chugach and Kenai Peninsula State Parks.

Even with simple tools, damage can be done. Care should be taken to minimize scarring the terrain or destroying natural resources. Fish and the aquatic insects which fish eat have difficulty surviving in heavily silted streams. You should not wash soil and vegetative material directly into the stream flow, as the silt and the decay of organic matter can cut off the oxygen supply to fish eggs buried within gravel spawning beds. Digging in the gravel beds can also destroy fish eggs.

Respect archaeological, paleontological, and historical objects that you may find. It is unlawful to remove such artifacts from the site. In national parks, mineral specimens, except platinum, silver, gemstones and fossils, may be collected by hand in areas not specifically closed to mineral collecting.

COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES

If you want to learn more about gold mining and, perhaps, get a little color in a pan, but

you do not have the time and/or interest for the investigation into land status, then you might want to consider taking advantage of a commercial outfit. These businesses have mining claims and will often rent you a pan and give some instruction. More information on commercial enterprises is available from the local Chamber of Commerce or Visitor Center in the area.

LOCATIONS FOR RECREATIONAL GOLD PANNING

Always check to make sure that you are not on private property or on a mining claim before you start any mining activity. Check to make sure that the stream is not restricted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for fish protection.

STATE PARKS

In Chugach and Kenai Peninsula State Parks note special regulations under "Equipment" and "Environmental Considerations". At the Independence Mine State Historical Park's visitor center north of Palmer, you can borrow gold pans for use in the creeks within state park boundaries. A \$5 parking fee is the only cost for panning in this area.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

.Nome Creek 57.5 mile Steese Highway, northeast of Fairbanks. (Take U.S. Creek Road 6 miles to Nome Creek, then turn left: there are some mining claims to the right. No suction dredges allowed.)

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

.Private concessions and historical sites with unique remnants of earlier gold mining days. Open mining is permitted for a fee.

.Crow Creek Mine .located near Girdwood
.Hubbard Mining Museum near Cooper Landing.

Creeks or Rivers Stay Within

Tincan, Lyon, Bertha, Pete's 1/4 mi. (.4K) of Seward/Anchorage Highway and Spokane

Silvertip 1/8 mi. (.2K) upstream from highway.

Sixmile Mile 1.5 (2.4K) of Hope Road to 5.5 mi. (8.9K) of Hope Road; stay on roadside.

Slate and Summit 1/8 mi. (.2K) of the main highway.

Granite Granite Creek area, anywhere except 300 ft. (91 meters) of campground.

Butcher and Tenderfoot Entire drainage.

Crescent Area downstream from bridge on old Sterling Highway (no suction dredges).

Cooper 1/4 mi. (.4K) of new Sterling Hwy (no suction dredges.)

ADDRESSES WHICH ARE USEFUL FOR RECREATIONAL GOLD MINERS

MAPS: Alaska **Office** U.S.G.S.
4230 University Drive

U.S.G.S. Map Distribution
Box 25286, Building 810

Anchorage, AK 99508-4664
(907) 786-7011

Denver, CO 80225
1-800-USA-MAPS

INFORMATION ON LAND STATUS:

Bureau of Land Management

Land Information or
222 West 7th Avenue #13
Anchorage, AK 99513
Phone: (907) 271-5960

Fairbanks Support Center
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99709-3844
Phone: (907) 474-2251

INFORMATION ON MINING:

Alaska Division of Mining
3601 C Street, Suite 200 or
Anchorage, AK 99510
Phone: (907) 762-2261

3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks, AK 99709-4613
Phone: (907) 451-2790

INFORMATION ON STREAM RESTRICTIONS:

**Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Habitat Division**

333 Raspberry Road or
Anchorage, AK 99502
Phone: (907) 344-0541

1300 College Road
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: (907) 452-1531

OTHER AGENCIES MANAGING LAND IN ALASKA:

Alaska State Parks
Department of Natural Resources
550W. 7th Ave., Suite 1260
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-8400

U.S. **Fish** & Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone: (907) 786-3487

U.S. Forest Service
Chugach National Forest
3301 C St., Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone: (907) 271-2500
National Park Service
Alaska Regional Office
2525 Gambell St., Room 107
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone: (907) 257-2634
(Minerals Management)

LIST OF REFERENCES ON RECREATION GOLD MINING

Alaska State Division of Mining Suggests Tune Saving **Tips for Prospective Gold Seekers**.
Alaska

Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining.

Amateur Gold Prospecting .Information circular #18, Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources,
Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys.

Prospecting **for Gold** in the United States .U.S. Geological Survey.

Recreational Suction **Dredging** .Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources, Division of Mining.

Recreational Gold Panning in Chugach National Forest . US Forest Service.

. This handout has been researched and produced by the Alaska Public Lands Information Center

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